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United Nations Reform: measures and proposals

A Millennium Assembly of the United Nations system (Special Commission) and a Millennium Forum

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The year 2000 constitutes a unique and symbolically compelling moment for Member States to articulate and affirm an animating vision for the United Nations in the new era. Accordingly, in his report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950), the Secretary-General proposed that the session of the General Assembly in the year 2000 be designated "The Millennium Assembly", and that it include a summit segment that could be called "The Millennium Summit"; that a non-governmental Millennium Forum be held in conjunction with the Assembly; and that Member States consider convening a ministerial-level Special Commission to examine the relations among the various component parts of the United Nations system.

2. In its resolution 52/12 B of 19 December 1997, the General Assembly recognized the need to consider changes within the United Nations of a more fundamental nature than those encompassed by that resolution, and invited the Secretary-General to elaborate further his proposals in that regard. The present note contains the Secretary-General's elaborations concerning the General Assembly session in the year 2000.

Millennium Assembly

3. The Secretary-General recommends that the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly be designated the Millennium Assembly and that a high-level segment be devoted to in-depth consideration of the theme "The United Nations in the twenty-first century". This high-level segment would be called the Millennium Summit. The integration of the Millennium Summit into the regular session of the Assembly would facilitate the participation of Heads of State and Government while maximizing continuity in the Assembly's normal programme of work.

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4. The Millennium Summit would be asked to provide guidance to the Organization for meeting the challenges of the new century. Fifty-five years after its founding, and in the context of a radically different world than existed even a mere decade earlier, what kind of United Nations do Member States desire? What substantive objectives are they prepared to support? In carrying out its missions, how should the United Nations relate to and interact with the increasingly densely populated universe of international institutions? An increasingly robust global civil society? Ever more integrated global markets and systems of production?

5. To facilitate focused discussions and concrete decisions at the Millennium Summit, the Secretary-General proposes to prepare a report on the Millennium Assembly's theme, "The United Nations in the twenty-first century". His report would be submitted to Member States by midsummer of the year 2000. It would draw on three main sources.

6. The first would be a series of informal events, organized in close cooperation with Member States, perhaps modelled on the World Hearings on Development held in New York from 6 to 10 June 1994 (see A/49/320, annex). They would involve Member States as well as non-state actors and would be convened in various regional centres around the world. The hope is that such events would serve as a source of innovative ideas regarding specific objectives the United Nations should strive to achieve in the decades ahead in the five core areas of its work: peace and security, economic and social affairs, development cooperation, humanitarian affairs and human rights.

7. Secondly, the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly will be preceded by numerous events of a more specialized nature in the United Nations – taking stock of progress achieved in the wake of world conferences, for example, or examining sectoral issues, as in the case of the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The substantive results of those events need to be considered in a comprehensive manner and their implications for the overall structure and functioning of the United Nations system need to be spelled out systematically. The Millennium Summit and Assembly afford an opportunity for doing so. The Secretary-General's report would include a synthesis of the major substantive and institutional implications of the prior events for the work of the Organization as a whole.

8. Finally, the Secretary-General's report would draw on the results of consultations that are taking place within the Administrative Committee on Coordination, as described in the following section, concerning how to take maximum advantage of the many complementarities and synergies that exist within the United Nations system as a whole.

Special Commission

9. The decentralized system of United Nations agencies has built-in flexibility and also the advantage of engaging a very broad range of constituencies, within Governments as well as from civil society. At the same time, it remains unclear whether the unity of purpose and coherence of action that is necessitated by the new challenges facing the United Nations can be mustered within those arrangements.

10. An intensive process of consultations has been initiated within the Administrative Committee on Coordination to examine, among other issues, the impact of the reforms undertaken by each agency on the others and on their respective roles within the system, and the extent to which those reforms are contributing to the responsiveness of the system as a whole.

11. The Secretary-General recommends that the Millennium Assembly be asked to assess, in the light of the process within the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the extent

to which a clearer division of labour within the system is emerging through a sharpening of the mandates, competencies and comparative advantages of the component parts. This assessment should help to determine whether the present constitutional framework governing the agencies and their relationships with the United Nations is sufficiently flexible to adapt and respond to the challenges ahead.

12. The need for and feasibility of establishing a Special Commission to examine this constitutional framework, as outlined in the Secretary-General's reform report (A/51/950, para. 89), should be viewed in this context. If the need is determined to exist, the Millennium Assembly may wish to establish such a Commission.

Millennium Forum

13. If the United Nations is to continue to play a vital role in the century ahead, it is imperative that it benefit from the imagination and engage the support of the world's people. The Secretary-General has therefore proposed that non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors organize a Millennium Forum in connection with the Millennium Assembly, perhaps immediately preceding it. Indeed, consultations among non-governmental organizations towards that end have already begun. It may be desirable to establish liaison mechanisms with the non-governmental preparatory processes.